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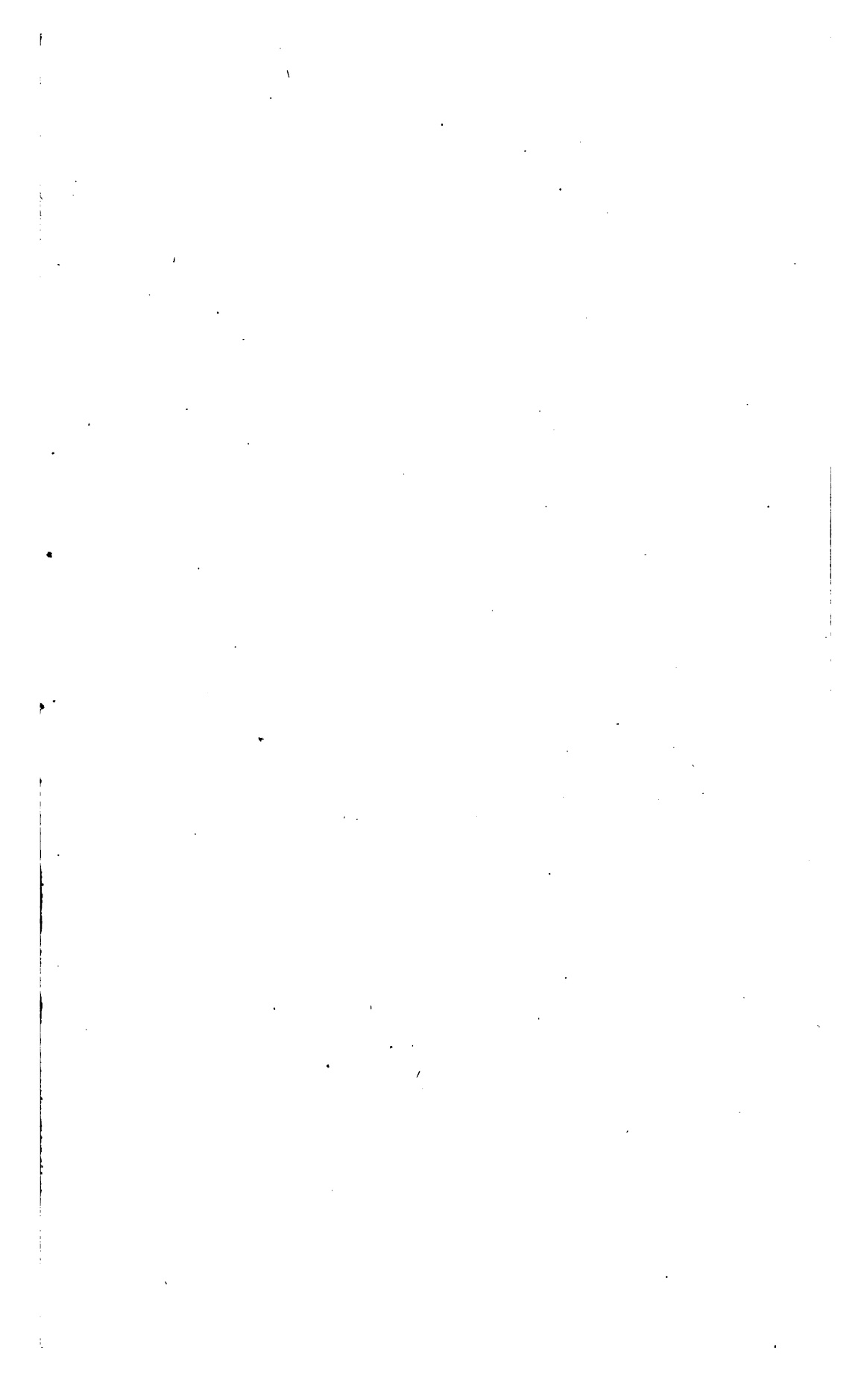
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A

SERMON,

DELIVERED AT POMFRET,

JULY 18, 1819,

At the Funeral of

DEACON SIMEON COTTON,

WHO DIED JULY 16TH, 1819,

IN THE 80TH YEAR OF HIS AGE.

BY JAMES PORTER,

Pastor of the first Church, in Pomfret, (Conn.)

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SERMON.

My times are in thy hand.—PSALM, XXXI, 15.

REASON and revelation unitedly assent that he who made, must also govern the world. "His kingdom ruleth over all." In every event, whether great or small, the providence of God is concerned. Not only the rise and fall of mighty empires, but even the shaking of a leaf, and the movement of an atom, are under the management and control of Jehovah. An insect is no more forgotten, and overlooked by him, than an angel; an atom than a world. The omniscient, omnipresent God is certainly able to attend, at one and the same time, to all the concerns of his creatures, and to all events that take place throughout his vast dominions. A falling sparrow is not forgotten by him. And he numbers the very hairs of our heads. Mat. x. 23, 30. Nothing, therefore, can befall us, without his knowledge and permission.

The Psalmist was fully convinced of this truth, when he uttered the words of the text. He was, at that time, surrounded with enemies and dangers. "Have mercy, upon me," says he, "O Lord, for

I am in trouble ; mine eye is consumed with grief. I was a reproach among all mine enemies, but especially among my neighbours, and a fear to mine acquaintance : they that did see me without, fled from me. I have heard the slander of many : fear was on every side, while they took counsel together against me, they devised to take away my life."

Nothing could support a man in such a perilous situation but a strong faith in an overruling providence. This was the Psalmist's support. He knew that no one could take away his life, nor touch a hair of his head, without permission from Jehovah. A firm confidence in the divine government, enabled him to rise above his fears and to rejoice in God, though in the midst of powerful enemies and alarming dangers. In the language of triumph, he exclaims : " But I trusted in thee, O Lord. I said, thou art my God. My times are in thy hand."

David here declares his conviction, that the duration of his troubles, the period of his deliverance, the continuance of his life, and all his concerns, were wholly in the power of the Lord to manage and control as he pleased. The same is true of each and every individual of the human race. In reference to all the affairs of man, God has placed the times and seasons in his own power.

To illustrate the words of the text, I observe

I. That as to our birth, with its attendant circumstances, our times are in God's hand.

There is "a time to be born." It is obvious that we have not the control of this all-important season. We cannot choose in what period, nor in what part of the world we will come into existence. God alone determines the time and place of our nativity. One is born in the deserts of Arabia, in the wilds of America, or in some of the numerous isles of the sea ; and is a heathen, of course : another is born in a christian land, where from infancy to age, from the cradle to the grave, he enjoys the full blaze of gospel light. One is born among idolators, and is early initiated into the mysteries of a religion, whose characteristics are pollution and cruelty : another is born among the worshippers of the true God, where, in childhood, he is made acquainted with the scriptures, and taught to walk in the path that leads to eternal life. Even in christian countries, very various are the circumstances under which different persons come into the world. Some are the children of affluence, others of poverty. One is born in a cottage, another in a palace. Some have irreligious parents, from whose example they soon learn to despise the scriptures, to trifle with the most solemn truths of the gospel, and to seek their happiness in worldly acquisitions. They are suffered to grow up in ignorance of God, live and die in sin. Others are favoured with pious parents, by the influence of whose example, instructions and prayers, they are early allured to the worship and service of their

Maker. By the blessing of heaven upon parental faithfulness, they become savingly acquainted with the way of life. With respect to these and many other circumstances that might be mentioned relative to our birth, the providence of God is to be acknowledged. Our times are in his hands. The time and the place of our nativity, with their respective advantages, and disadvantages, are under the control of him, without whose knowledge and permission, no event can take place. It is obvious to the eye of reason that he who creates us, must know and determine the time and all the other circumstances of our entrance into the world. And the inspired Psalmist asserts the same. Adoring the omniscience and omnipresence of God, he thus addresses his Maker, "Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them." Ps. 139. 16. Several persons are mentioned in the scriptures; the time and many circumstances of whose births were not only known to God, but predicted for the benefit of his people, long before they come into existence. And undoubtedly, God controls the time, place, and all the circumstances, of the birth of every individual of the human race, though he has not seen fit to reveal them to us. "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world. Acts 15. 18.

The period of man's nativity is an all-important season to him. He then enters upon an endless state of existence. The present life will indeed soon pass away, but we shall not at death cease to be; eternity is before us. In this world also, each individual is destined to pass through interesting scenes. What we shall in particular experience in our journey through life, no man can tell before hand. No one knows, but that Being, who comprehends the end from the beginning, whose understanding is infinite.

We observe, therefore,

II. That our times are in God's hand, as our condition in this life is respected. It frequently happens that through the controlling influence of events purely providential, the place of a man's residence and his occupation, with its advantages and disadvantages, are widely different from what he anticipated. Time was when Jacob little thought that he should ever descend with his family into Egypt and sojourn, and die in the land of Ham, leaving his posterity to be enslaved by the Egyptians. When Joseph was cast into the pit by his brethren, and afterwards sold by them for a slave; he knew not that in this way, God was preparing to advance him to great authority in the court of Pharaoh.

In fact, human life is, for the most part, little else than a series of disappointments. No man can say absolutely what course he shall pursue

through life, nor determine whether success shall attend, his efforts or not. A thousand unforeseen events, over which he can have no control, may take place, which will deeply affect his interest, and change, perhaps, all his plans of operation. It is not at our option, whether prosperity, or adversity, health, or sickness, riches, or poverty, the favour, or the frowns of men, be our lot. Our times are in God's hand. He orders out all the circumstances of our lives. We are to acknowledge his hand in every event. What man calls accidents are under his direction. If we enjoy prosperity, the bible teaches us to ascribe it to the blessing of God; and to give him the praise. From him cometh down every good and perfect gift. It is the blessing of the Lord that maketh rich. Prov. 10, 22. Unless God succeed his labours, all man's efforts to acquire wealth will be fruitless. The same is true with respect to every other object of his pursuit. He is entirely dependent upon God for success. The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all." Ex. 9. 11.

A man may have a fair prospect of success in an undertaking, and yet be disappointed, as his best concerted plans may be frustrated by some of those numerous unforeseen events, which seem to come by chance, but which are, in reality, the appoint-

ment of God. Job acknowledges an overruling providence in his own case, both when favoured with prosperity, and when brought into adversity. Reduced from affluence to indigence, and deprived of all his children in one day, he exercised the greatest submission to the divine will. He acknowledges the hand of God in his sore affliction, and said : "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord." Job 1. 21. The truth now under consideration, is confirmed by a great variety of facts and declarations found in the scriptures, all concurring to show that all the circumstances of our lives are under the management and superintendence of the Almighty. But it is not necessary to enlarge in proof of a point so plain.

Let us, therefore, see the hand of God in all the changing scenes, through which we are called to pass. If prosperity be our lot ; if we escape those peculiar trials which chequer the lives of others, let us give God the praise : On the other hand, if adversity be our lot ; if we meet with sore trials and disappointments ; if in the book of divine providence, bitter things appear to be written against us, we must labour to possess our souls in patience, and to realize that it is God, who sinks our comforts low. Affliction does not spring from the dust ; nor troubles rise by chance. Though we cannot fathom, we should humbly reverence and adore the dispensations of providence, as dictated and con-

trolled by infinite benevolence. Then, like the Psalmist, we shall be able, in every situation, to trust in the Lord, and say, "Thou art my God.—My times are in thy hand." Thou, in infinite wisdom and goodness, dost manage all the concerns of my life, so that I must not fear, in whatever circumstances placed.

III. Our times are in the hand of God, as our spiritual birth is respected.

Resignation is indispensable to the salvation of man. In our natural state of alienation from God, we are totally unfit for the kingdom of heaven.—Without a change of heart we must be miserable for ever. It is the declaration of Him who cannot lie, that, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." John 3. 3. An inspired apostle has likewise positively asserted, that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord." Heb. 12. 14. But for this spiritual birth, this change of heart, this renovation of nature, man is dependant upon God. This is expressly taught in many passages of the bible, and is abundantly manifest from the whole tenour of scripture. "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." John 1. 12, 13. "God who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened

us together with Christ ; (by grace ye are saved.)" Eph. 9. 4, 5. "Not by works of righteousness, which we have done ; but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost." Titus 3. 5. These passages fully establish the doctrine under discussion. It appears that God the Holy Ghost is the agent in the regeneration of man. And it is plain that he must be a sovereign agent. As the wind bloweth where it listeth, so the Holy Spirit works where, and in the hearts of whom he pleases. While he leaves some to live and die in an unregenerate state, he renews others, and makes them a willing people in the day of his power.— While he acts as a sovereign, he also works by means in renewing the heart of man. "Of his own will," says the apostle, "begat he us with the word of truth." James 1. 18. God, if he pleased, could, without controversy, change the heart, and sanctify the affections of a heathen, without favouring him "with the word of truth." But this does not appear to be his plan of operation. If he designs to save an individual, who is living in heathenish darkness, he either brings him in his providence to a land of light, or sends him the gospel. It is undoubtedly a general truth, that "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Rom. 10. 17. The Lord acts as a sovereign in affording to some the means of regeneration, while he leaves others des-

titute. It is at his pleasure also to render the word effectual to our salvation, or to leave it to harden us, and to prove a savour of death unto death.— Not all who hear the gospel are born again. Our times are in God's hand. He renews whom he will. Sometimes afflictions are instrumental of awaking sinners from the stupor of earthly pursuits, and directing their attention to the word of truth. But if afflictions are sanctified, so as to prove the means of conversion to any one; it is God who has made them effectual to this end, and the praise is due to him alone. Whatever be the instrument employed to accomplish our salvation, God is the universal agent. To his operation, every saint will, through eternity, attribute his spiritual birth. It becomes us to be fully convinced of this truth, that from a deep sense of our helpless, dependant state, we may be induced to throw ourselves, without reserve, upon the mercy of God, and be excited to embrace, in faith, the word of truth, the gospel of salvation.

IV. Our times are in God's hand, as it respects the period of our death, with all its circumstances.

There is "a time to die," as well as "a time to be born." It is evident, from scripture, that a certain term of life is appointed to man which he cannot exceed. This is fixed by God himself: See Job 14. 5, which is fully to our purpose. "Seeing his days are determined, the number of his months are with thee, thou hast appointed his

bounds that he cannot pass." Paul, in reasoning with the Athenians about the providence of God, declares, that "in him we live, and move, and have our being; and that he hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of our habitation." Acts 17. 26. It is the voice of reason also, that he who creates man on the earth and appoints the place of his residence, should likewise determine the length of his life, and the period of his death. God is styled "our life" and "the length of our days." And as his providence is conversant about all the affairs of men, so that the very hairs of their head are numbered, it is plain that the duration of their existence must also be under his control. It is sometimes asserted, that if the bonds of human life are fixed, means for its preservation are unnecessary. This inference, however, does not follow, because the means are a part of God's plan of operation, as well as the end. If he has determined that we shall live to a certain age, he has also determined to give us the supports of life, and to prevent every thing that might destroy it. If any are cut down by some violent disease, or killed by what the world calls an accident, that disease, or that accident was determined as a means to bring life to a close. If some bring upon themselves, by their vices, premature death; those vices God determined to permit, and he knew their fatal effects; so that he was not disappointed as to the number of their months. They came to,

but did not pass the bounds of their habitation which he had fixed. Their times were in his hand.

Very different as to length, is the term of life assigned to different individuals. With multitudes, life is emphatically short. "They come forth as a flower and are cut down ; flee also as a shadow, and continue not." Almost as soon as they have opened their eyes on the things of time, they close them in eternity. Others are cut down in the bloom and vigour of youth. Some are called away in the meridian of life. Others live to be old, and are gathered to their graves, like stocks of corn fully ripe in their season. Sometimes the wretched are suffered to prolong the time of their miseries ; while the successful are cut off in the midst of their career. The sickly often carry the robust and healthy to the grave ; and not unfrequently do parents build the tombs of their children. Some depart, when just on the point of accomplishing an object, long pursued : just when they are beginning to think of enjoying the fruit of their labours. Some of all ages and conditions, are swept away without distinction. The young just entering upon active life, with many flattering prospects before them, are cut down by the great destroyer. The father is called away in the midst of his usefulness from the embraces of a beloved family ; and the man of the world is forced to leave his schemes of earthly aggrandizement unaccomplished. Thus various

are the circumstances attending the deaths of different individuals ; yet they are all under the control of divine providence.

Again : our times are in God's hand, as it respects our having, or not having particular notice of death's approach.

Some have long and repeated warnings. They consume away with some lingering disease ; they are favoured with the full exercise of their reason, and are constantly admonished to prepare for their dissolution. Others have no particular notice that life is near its close. Death comes in an unexpected moment. They are overtaken as by a thief in the night. " For man also knoweth not his time ; as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare ; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them."

Again : the manner of death's approach is not at our disposal. The king of terrors wears a thousand forms. Some perish by what are called the accidents of life ; others by the sudden shock of some acute distemper. Some are for years dying and wasting away. Earth, air and sea are leagued with death, and oft perform his work.— Our very food, the sustenance of life, sometimes becomes the instrument of death. But at whatever period of life, in whatever way, and by whatever means, we are brought down to the grave, the providence of God is to be acknowledged. He is

the sovereign disposer of all events, the arbiter of life and death. He appoints the time, and manages all the circumstances of our dissolution. Our times are in God's hand.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. What a wonderful being is God ! He superintends all his works, and overrules all events in such a manner as to display his own glory, and bring to the universe the greatest possible good, without doing the least violence to the moral agency, or perfect liberty of his rational creatures.— That God can and does comprehend, in his designs, and control, in his providence, all events that will ever take place in the universe, and yet that his subjects remain free agents, and accountable for their actions, is fully taught in the scriptures. Men are represented, in all parts of the bible, as acting freely. They are punished and rewarded, and in every respect treated as rational creatures, as moral agents, whose actions are all voluntary. In fact, every man is conscious that he is not a mere machine, that in his moral conduct, no physical necessity operates. “Whatever he does is the result of choice absolutely unconstrained.” At the same time, it is manifest, from a great variety of scripture declarations, and facts, that God is the sovereign of the universe, that he manages and controls all creatures and all events, and that he causes the most voluntary actions of his

subjects, to aid in the accomplishment of his designs. To explain this, to show how free-agency, and dependency harmonize in man, is beyond the capacity of finite minds. Nor would a complete comprehension of this subject afford us any peculiar benefit. The fact would not be any more certain than it is now, that God reigns without at all infringing our liberty. Let it, therefore, be remembered that notwithstanding the providence of God is as universal and particular as has been stated, yet men have a voluntary influence in forming their own characters, and in deciding their final destiny. The sinner acts freely in hardening his heart and fitting himself for destruction. While he trifles with divine things, and neglects the salvation of his soul, he does precisely what he chooses to do. And thus he is active in fixing his future doom, and will be able at the last day, to accuse none but himself with being the real cause of his final perdition. The saints also are active in the formation of their characters and in becoming meet for heaven. Though they are infinitely indebted to the grace of God, by which they are what they are, yet they are not idle, but actively engaged in making their calling and election sure. While they repent of their sins, believe in Christ, and walk in newness of life, they act most freely, and do nothing but what they choose to do, and thus they have an important influence in fitting themselves as vessels of mercy, afore prepared for glory. Let none, there-

fore, think to find an excuse for their sins, in the plea, that they cannot act otherwise than they do. This is a refuge of lies, that will not screen the sinner from condemnation, when God shall call him to his bar. Our moral conduct is our own : it is free and unconstrained ; for this we must render an account. Shall we then ever forget that our present conduct will have an influence vastly important, a bearing infinitely interesting, upon our future, eternal destiny.

2. The providence of God is matter of joy to the universe. "The Lord reigns, let the earth rejoice." None but the determined enemies of God, can be opposed to the divine government. They indeed who will not consent to be under the domination of the king of heaven, have reason to tremble at the thought that "his kingdom ruleth over all." They have nothing to expect but to be dashed to pieces with a rod of iron. No wonder they are disposed to say in their hearts : "No God that minds the affairs of men." But their wishes will never be gratified. God will never relinquish his right of exercising a sovereign dominion over the works of his hands. He will continue to govern the world according to his own pleasure. And it is obviously the interest of all his loyal subjects that he should sit on the throne of the universe ; because he will not fail to manage their concerns with perfect rectitude, and in the best manner that

infinite wisdom and benevolence can dictate. Accordingly the heavenly hosts are represented as rejoicing in his government, saying "Hallelujah, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth."

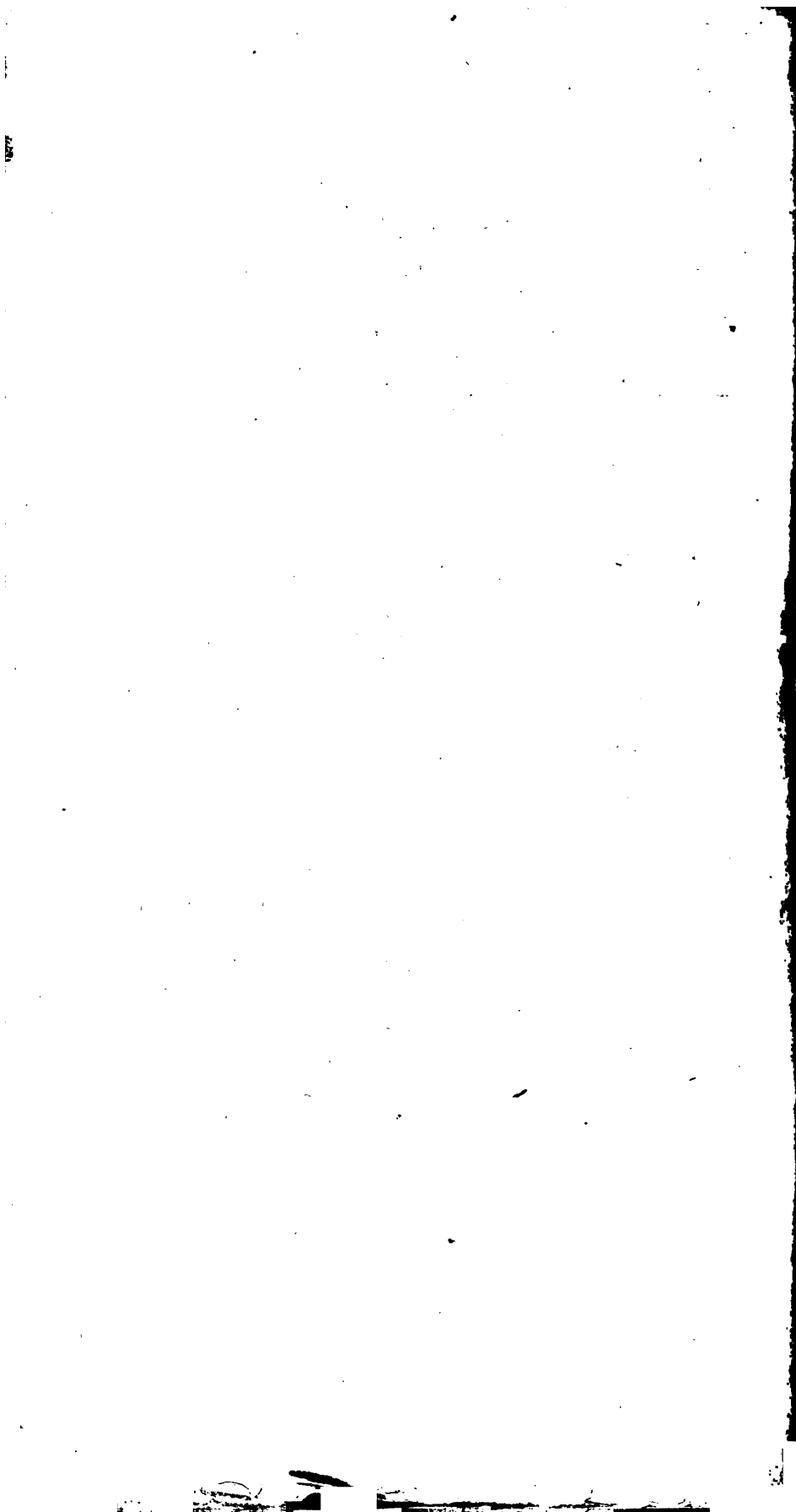
3. Our subject shows us where we may find a refuge in trouble; "God is the refuge of his saints." Nothing can support us amidst the varied trials of life, but a firm confidence and trust in the divine government. If we overlook a particular providence and attribute events to chance, gloomy will be our situation, and cheerless our prospects. We can have no security for our most important interests. But if we see God on the throne, and are convinced that our times are in his hand, so that nothing can befall us without his permission; and if we can feel assured that all the dispensations of his providence, are dictated by unerring wisdom and boundless benevolence, we shall find a resting place for our souls, a refuge in trouble: a filial confidence in the perfect rectitude of all God's dealings with us, will lead to submission, and enable us to say: "All is right," "it is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good." Then we may possess our souls in patience, and be joyful in tribulation. Like the Psalmist, we shall trust in the Lord, and say, "Thou art my God, my times are in thy hand."

This subject will afford the mourning relatives of him whose cold remains are now before us, powerful motives for christian submission. The

times of your departed friend were in God's hand. All the circumstances of his death, were under the control of him, whose ways are perfect. The Lord hath done it. This should hush every rising murmur. You are not the only mourners to-day. Society laments the loss of a very valuable member. The poor are bereaved of a friend. They, however, cannot feel as you do, who have lost a husband, a father and a brother. It becomes you to view the hand of God in your affliction, and to aim to obtain a sanctified improvement of it. God only can afford you the consolation you need in this, the day of your sorrow. To him we commend you; to him we exhort you to go. May the God of all grace and consolation bind up the broken heart of the afflicted widow. You are called, Madam, to mourn the loss of your dearest earthly friend, the companion of your youth, the sharer of your joys and sorrows. While you mourn, you will endeavour not to murmur. You hope that your husband has gone to rest. You believe that your loss is his gain. For almost sixty years, he has been a professed disciple of Christ. And you are acquainted with the evidence which he exhibited, during a long life, of being a real child of God. You do not sorrow as those who have no hope in the death of friends. May you trust in God, who is able to support you, and more than make up your present loss. Remember that your times are in the hands of the Lord. May you

cast yourself upon the arms of him, who is styled the God and husband of the widow, and he will be with you in trouble ; he will order out all the circumstances of your life in covenant mercy for your good ; he will support you in death, and be your everlasting portion beyond the grave. The children of the deceased will please to accept our sympathy. You mourn the loss of a kind, and affectionate parent, who appeared to feel a deep solicitude for your welfare, and assiduously laboured to instil into your minds, the principles of piety and virtue. May you long remember his instructions, and derive benefit from those prayers, which, for many years, he offered in your behalf. Labour to follow his example as far as he followed Christ. To religion alone can you look for consolation in this and in every scene of affliction. May you view the hand of God in your bereavement, exercise due submission to his will, and so live as to be prepared to sing the song of triumph, O death ! where is thy sting ? O grave ! where is thy victory ?

To the aged sisters of the deceased, God, in his providence, is speaking in emphatical language, and loudly admonishing them to be waiting in constant readiness for the coming of their Lord. Dear friends, God has come very near to you in this affliction ; he has removed your only surviving brother, and is plainly saying that you must soon follow him. May you look to the Lord and be comforted in your tribulation. Let this mournful dis-





pensation of providence, stimulate your efforts to be always ready for death's approach. Remember that your times are in God's hand, who may call you away, at a moment when you think not. May you have your lamps trimmed and burning, be supported under this affliction, and under all trials of life, and the infirmities of age, and at last, come up from the wilderness, leaping on the arm of the Beloved.

Let all the relatives of the deceased be exhorted to make a wise and salutary improvement of this afflictive providence. Remember, my friends, that "no man hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit, neither hath he power in the day of death; and there is no discharge in that war."—Your times are in God's hand. At an unexpected moment he may terminate your earthly existence, and call you to his awful tribunal. As you cannot control the time, nor circumstances of your death, it is your wisdom and interest, to be always ready to meet the king of terrors.

Let this dying assembly be constrained, by the solemnity of the funeral-scene, this day, by the worth of the immortal soul, by the joys of heaven, and the miseries of hell, to seek in earnest after preparation for death.

Improve time as it passes. Put not off the evil day. Wait not for a more convenient season.—How soon you may die, or what may happen at the close of life, you know not. You may be de-

prived of reason, and not be in a situation to prepare for eternity. You may die suddenly and without a moment's warning. Your times are in God's hand. Let none forget that their eternal destiny is involved in the manner in which they improve the present life.

